

East Hampton Public Schools

Superintendent of Schools

Leadership Profile

Prepared by

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Introduction:

As the East Hampton Board of Education faced its most important role of hiring a new Superintendent of Schools, it viewed this challenge as an opportunity. Since the district has seen a series of transitions in leadership, the Board wanted to increase the likelihood of getting an excellent match in its next leader. Therefore, the Board hired Mary Broderick, a search consultant with the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, to gather ideas and observations from many constituents in what they viewed to be the strengths and challenges of the community and schools of East Hampton and desired qualities, characteristics, and philosophies they wanted in a new leader.

This Leadership Profile presents findings from 12 focus groups, multiple conversations, and an online survey conducted in late August and early September 2015. The consultant spoke with 58 individuals, including students, parents, teachers, Central Office staff, administrators, board of education members, town board members, town officials, and other residents. In addition, 210 East Hampton residents and staff completed the survey posted on the East Hampton Public Schools website. In conducting the focus groups and developing the survey, the consultant used an unbiased, structured approach involving a series of consistent questions. In addition to asking about strengths and challenges of the East Hampton Public Schools and community which could affect future leadership requirements, she asked about the qualities, characteristics, experience, and skills most desirable in the next Superintendent of Schools. She is presenting the findings to the East Hampton Board of Education without revealing the identity of any individual contributor.

The East Hampton Board has made a commendable effort to include voices from many diverse and varied groups within the schools and community. Many thanks to the focus group participants and survey respondents whose commitment to the district and town was evident as they provided their perspectives.

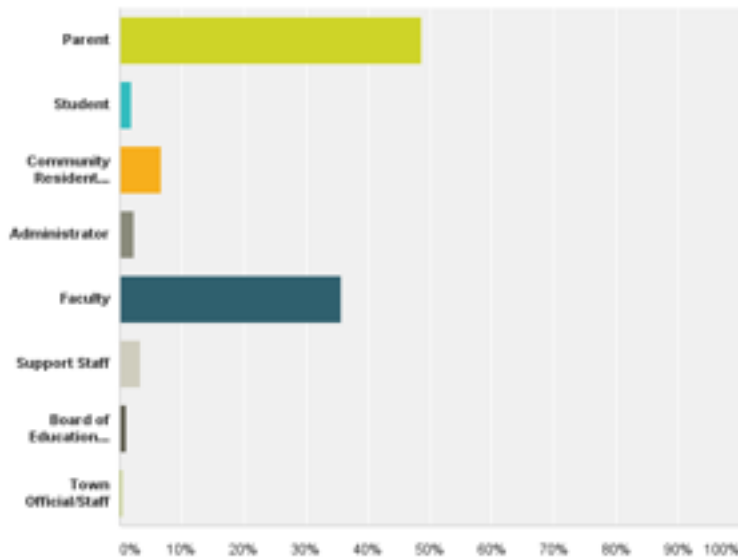
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Data Collection

In total, over 268 individuals participated either through a focus group or the online survey:

<u>12 Focus Groups and 4 interviews:</u>		<u>58 participants</u>
Board	12.1%	7
Students	13.8%	8
Parents / Community	15.5%	9
Town Officials	6.9%	4
Administrators	17.2%	10
Central Office Staff	8.6%	5
Teachers	25.9%	15

<u>Survey responses:</u>		<u>210 participants</u>
Parent	48.6%	102
Student	1.9%	4
Community Resident (non-parent)	6.7%	14
Administrator	2.4%	5
Teachers	35.7%	75
Support Staff	3.3%	7
Board of Education	1.0%	2
Town Official / Staff	.5%	1



Please note that the data collected do not represent a scientific sampling, but a representation of East Hampton Public Schools and community. Though the consultant heard the perspectives of many, this profile cannot entirely capture the complexity and nuances of the schools and community. Nevertheless, the information yields some useful insights for the search process. Items are included in the following report if, in the consultant’s judgment, they were repeated by a sufficient number of respondents to warrant the East Hampton Board of Education’s attention.

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The following themes emerged through an analysis of all interviews, focus groups, and survey responses. In each category, themes are presented beginning with the most frequently mentioned.

Strengths of East Hampton and its Schools:

Excellent Teachers and Staff:

Far and away the top strength of East Hampton, according to stakeholders, is its dedicated, caring staff. Students described teachers as fair, engaging, and motivating. Parents spoke of the passion teachers have for student growth. Many teachers spend their whole careers here and are deeply committed to the town and its children and families, often very involved in the community. Teachers go out of their way to ensure each student feels known and encouraged to grow. Attesting to teacher openness, students spoke of feeling safe to propose new ideas.

Great Students:

The sense of caring attributed to teachers and staff was echoed by the students, who pride themselves on having good relations with one another. They and others spoke of faculty and administration who were very supportive and set a great example for the students, especially in supporting difference. Students are generally motivated to achieve. Nearly all students participate in extra- and co-curricular offerings. If students are shy about signing up, teachers reach out to pull them in. Though there is no community service requirement, students volunteer in high numbers.

Close-knit Community:

A pretty, bucolic community in central/eastern Connecticut, East Hampton is easily accessed from several state highways. Though the town has grown and undergone some economic shifts in recent years, most stakeholders spoke about the sense of belonging that permeates this nice, small town. People, including students, feel like they know one another and are known. Residents talked about being a close-knit community where residents care about and support each other. The community cares about and is engaged in the schools.

Strong Parental Involvement:

East Hampton parents value and like to be involved in their schools. Some parents described their passionate participation and commitment to the schools and teachers. Others spoke of parent and teacher collaboration and support dedicated to students, saying that parents are treated with respect and are considered part of the team educating East Hampton students.

Challenges facing East Hampton and its Schools:

Resources— Budget, Infrastructure, and Technology:

Many factors have compounded pressures on the fiscal status of the East Hampton schools. A state requirement that districts fund magnet tuition has diverted local resources, creating a vicious cycle: As magnets lure parents away with state-of-the-art facilities and “bells and whistles,” local schools are left with diminished resources to enhance programming and aging infrastructure.

Funding has become a perennial challenge, with the latest budget requiring three referenda to pass. The high school renovation project exacerbated a rift in the community between those wanting to spend more for education and those challenged by the tax effects, leading to a reluctance to support school spending. Though people say they want students to have the best, collectively they have not been willing to increase budgets. Resulting fiscal constraints have created pressures on existing staffing and significant transportation issues. Though there is a high school “renovate as new” project currently underway, many spoke of a generally dated infrastructure and antiquated technology.

Program:

Though generally very positive about their educations, students cited the most program shortcomings, noting a constantly changing curriculum as East Hampton has grappled with Common Core and shifting leadership. Students would like greater access to Advance Placement opportunities and are frustrated by the one- and two-course limits their sophomore and junior years, respectively. They asked for more opportunities to “get into the real world,” since they recognize the community’s limited ethnic diversity, and more chance to “explore creativity and culture.” Parents believe more arts should be offered at the high school level. The lack of access to pre-kindergarten for all families has left the opening for magnets to lure a number of parents away.

Communication:

Given the stressors mentioned above, a number of respondents cited the need to educate the broader East Hampton population on the excellent value of an East Hampton Public School education. Several said that parents and residents don’t appreciate how high quality their students’ education is, and would like to see the schools trumpet the excellence of their programs.

Demographic Shifts:

East Hampton has seen a significant increase in young professionals moving into town over the last decade. Some spoke of tensions between these individuals who may have

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more disposable income and advocate for school budgets versus those who have resided in the town who may not want to spend on schools and other services. Though many referred to a “tight-knit, caring” community, people nevertheless talked of “an eclectic community with interesting divides,” or “divergent views of spending priorities.”

East Hampton is among the many Connecticut school districts forecast to lose significant enrollment between now and 2025, potentially up to 33% of its student body. Simultaneously, the population over age 65 is forecast to rise by 68 percent in the same period.

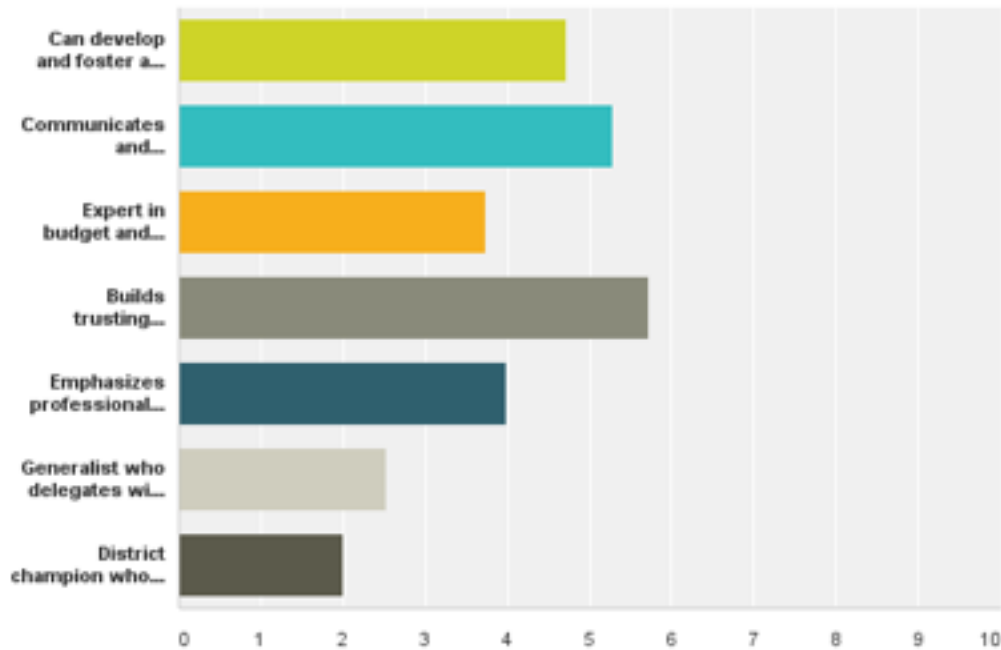
Politics:

With the backdrop of the shifts mentioned in the last section, some spoke of political upheaval, including antagonisms between the Board of Education, the last superintendent, the Board of Finance, and the Town Council. Compounding some of these tensions is Board of Education turnover due to terms limited by the town charter.

Leadership:

The district has recently experienced turnover in the role of Superintendent of Schools. In the context of changing expectations from the state and federal governments, people within the district have felt their efforts take place in an uncertain landscape on shifting sands. Staff at all levels have not felt supported, empowered, or recognized. Change has been imposed in blanket form, not cultivated strategically. People spoke of a lack of vision and failure to come to closure on many efforts. Missing were any spirit of trust or sense of a safe environment to take risks or ask for help. Many spoke of a need to heal.

Desired Qualities and Characteristics in a Superintendent:



Given these strengths and challenges, what would be the most important qualities and characteristics in a new superintendent to meet East Hampton’s challenges and allow the students and schools to thrive?

Builder of trusting relationships:

Though the labels are not fully evident above, the number one ability sought in East Hampton’s new superintendent is to build trusting relationships with students, staff, and community members. Given a difficult few years where staff members are feeling a loss of empowerment and worth, the new superintendent will need to be in the trenches with staff, motivating them and inspiring their best work. A superb listener who is kind, respectful, approachable, personable, empowering, and collaborative, a successful new leader will demonstrate commitment to the children and community through a constant presence in the schools and community, helping the district to heal within and restoring trust with the whole community. Politically savvy, the successful superintendent will communicate honestly and transparently with all, including town boards and residents.

Effective Communicator:

This new leader will communicate and collaborate effectively with staff at all levels and with other town boards, parents, and the community at large, attending both school and

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community events. This strong, warm, genuine leader and effective public speaker will garner respect as a team player, recognizing the importance of each individual in the system. The new superintendent will champion the schools with parents and the community.

Able to develop and foster collective vision:

Rather than coming to East Hampton with a defined vision, the new leader will bring a strong belief system and will listen carefully, then work together with the staff and community of East Hampton to craft a shared vision for the schools, drawing the best out of each member of the community, and always keeping children and education at the top of the agenda. Together the district will align efforts for students, ensuring coherence, interconnectedness, always working toward excellence. This leader will then hold high expectations for the staff and schools, and delegate with trust, allowing staff members to show their talents.

Interwoven in the qualities mentioned above are personal qualities survey respondents identified as most important for their next leader. These were echoed in the interviews and focus groups:

Keeps students' growth and wellbeing as the primary focus of what they do.

Accessible, approachable, and visible in the schools and community.

Decisive, confident, and objective problem solver with good judgment and resiliency.

Finally, East Hampton Public Schools' new leader will be committed to the community of East Hampton. Since the schools are looking to heal, stakeholders are looking for a passionate, committed leader who will bring positive spirit and energy to the district. Trustworthy and trusting, the leader will help to renew confidence in the district, its proud schools and community.